DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 100 841 SP 008 750

AUTHOR Loser, Ronald
TITLE Thoughts on Behavioral Objectives.
PUB DATE 74
NOTE 6p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Behavioral Objectives; *Educational Objectives; Educational Philosophy; Educational Problems; *Performance Based Education; *Performance Specifications; Problems

ABSTRACT

The behaviorist's assumptions that learning has not occurred unless a measurable change in student behavior takes place and that courses will be vastly improved if the exact goals are delineated on a day-to-day basis so that students and instructor know precisely what is expected of them, ring true but translate false. First, any time a dogma is used to prescribe an educational process, the intellectual areana is truncated; many ideas will not be introduced and pursued because no one has found a way to measure their apprehension behaviorally. Secondly, although some skills can be behaviorally tested, many intellectual activities are not reducible to performance objectives. It is questionable whether it is possible to generate meaningful behavioral objectives for any intellectual activity or course that requires (a) assimilation of broad reaches of abstract ideas, (b) cohesion of seemingly disjointed concepts, (c) sensitivity and insight, (d) techniques, and (e) new forms of expression. Thirdly, precise specification of the measurable classroom tasks that must be performed can destroy the challenge to excel. The preoccupation with measurable goals does nothing to arrest the predilection of man for pursuing short-term goals to the detriment of his long-term welfare. This is not to say that behaviorism has no place in the educational system; there are many topics that may be amenable to behaviorism--primarily those concerned with the transmission of skills. (HMD)

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THOUGHTS ON BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES

Memo received 3/16/74:

"April 1 is the deadline on materials that the dean's office has requested on our endeavors toward more effective teaching and conformity with institutional goals as typified by one course from each department. Materials submitted will carry: a) a statement of departmental goals, b) a lesson plan or outline for one class meeting in the course and an accompanying statement to show how the meeting in question leads toward the realization of departmental goals, c) and examination or short quiz aimed at measuring progress toward objectives in behavioral terms." (underscoring added)

It is indeed saddening to see that the cancerous panacea of behavioral educational models has been forced upon another institution, that the behaviorist educationist has been able to convince not only school boards and lay public, but also boards of trustees and our own college administration that all aspects of learning are enhanced by being placed in a behaviorist (short-term measurable goal) framework.

The behaviorist assumptions that:

1. unless a measurable change (determined via examination) in the student's behavior occurs, learning has not taken place [8];
2. courses will be vastly improved if the exact goals are delineated on a day by day basis so that both instructor and student know precisely what is expected of them [1],

ring true but translate false.

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In the first place, any time a dogma (only activities measurable in behavioral terms can be taught) is used to prescribe an educational process, the intellectual arena is truncated; many ideas will not be introduced and pursued simply because no one has found a way to measure their apprehension behaviorally, or because it is impossible to measure their assimilation. For example, one does not behaviorally measure understanding (the word itself is forbidden by behaviorist educationists), enthusiasm, curiosity, appreciation, motivation, or commitment. In adopting the behaviorist manifesto, one excludes, prescribes, proscribes. No goals are allowed but those measurable in behaviorist terms. It is a gross oversimplification to identify those things amenable to testing and behavioral change with education. [2]

In the second place, although some skills can be behaviorally tested [9], many intellectual activities are not reducible to performance objectives; and, so far, the only reductions of these activities to behaviorally testable attributes have resulted in their de-emphasis or trivialization. [7] Trivialities are most easily quantified and measured. [5] Many people have commented that mathematics lends itself to a behavioral paradigm, and in so commenting, reveal the extent of their mathematical illiteracy. In their naivety, they perceive mathematics as a collection of repetitious algorithms--algebraically manipulating numbers (usually integers), intersecting finite sets, factoring quadratics, doing arithmetic in number systems base n for $n \neq 10$, and other such trivialities. Fortunately, much more than mindless computing is involved in mathematical structures; and, in fact, there are many problems and mathematical theorems which <u>cannot</u> be solved or proved through finite algorithms (the cannot is

absolute--it has been proven impossible for finite algorithms within mathematics to broach these difficulties. [3]) The instrument of mathematics is proof; if a proof happens to contain an algorithm, that is acceptable, but many proofs cannot contain such procedures. One wonders if it is possible to generate meaningful behavioral objectives for any intellectural activity or course sequence such as art, composition, creative writing, mathematics, or any area that requires:

1. assimilation of broad reaches of abstract ideas,
2. cohesion of seemingly disjoint concepts,
3. sensitivity and insight,
4. technique,
5. new forms of expression.

At best, only (1) and (4) fall within the behaviorist framework.

In the third place, precise specification of the measurable classroom tasks that must be "performed" to earn grade X can destroy the challenge to excel. Many students will perform the task, then shut off their brains. It is a law of the universe that the probability of achieving a goal is inversely proportional to its desirability [4], yet educational technocrats insist on a strict goal oriented educational process. They seem to fail to realize that worthwhile goals are almost never completely accomplished, that life is in striving; that the taste of past accomplishment is flat, the joy in laurels is empty. The preoccupation with measurable goals does nothing to arrest man's prediliction for pursuing short-term goals to the profound detriment of his long-term welfare. [10]

It is highly unlikely that any single philosophy of education,

any one dogma, can encompass the free range of intellectural pursuits, or the ways in which one learns. It would be the quintessence of foolishness for educators to accept wholesale the behaviorist manifesto, to think that all educational problems and shortcomings will be swept away by this simple, direct, and wrong solution, or to allow behavioral psychologists, professional test-writers and other educational technologists to be the sole determiners of curricula. [9] This is not to say that behaviorism has no place in our educational system; total exclusion is as stupidly dogmatic as total deification. There are many classroom topics which may be amenable to behaviorism--those primarily concerned with the transmission of skills such as operation of educational media, mathematical algorithmic techniques, welding, elementary drivers education, or techniques in which the student is expected to habitually perform a sequence of simple tasks which require little reflection or insight. However, application of goalist behaviorism to those areas requiring reflective thought has only resulted in their trivialization; and it is absurd to do a superb job of teaching trivia. [1]

Ronald Loser
Department of Mathematics
Adams State College
Alamosa, Colorado 81101

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